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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000058

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [CASC](#) [EG](#) [SU](#) [UNHCR](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT: NO UNHCR ACCESS TO SUDANESE DETAINEES

REF: JONES-DIBBLE E-MAILS

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) UNHCR still has no access to the Sudanese being held by the GOE in temporary camps following a violent confrontation that occurred when GOE security forces ended the Sudanese group's three month protest over refugee policy. While the GOE has not formally declined UNHCR's access request, the UNHCR assistant regional representative in Cairo reports that the GOE is linking access to a new statement from UNHCR in Geneva that backs away from the critical comments Geneva made immediately following the violence. The UNHCR regional representative was at the MFA late on January 3, but no report on that meeting is yet available. DCM and other Emboffs have stressed with MFA and MOI Assistant Ministers and other officials the importance of UNHCR access to the Sudanese being held at temporary camps and the need to coordinate deportations with UNHCR. Although the GOE confirmed that at least 26 Sudanese refugee protesters died in the incident, it has tried in public fora to highlight its efforts to reach a negotiated solution to the impasse as well as alleged efforts to avoid injuring women and children, who represented a significant number of those killed. GOE officials have also confirmed that they have detained the Sudanese protesters in detention centers around Cairo and are screening them to determine their legal status. We understand from MOI sources that deportations may occur, but not before consultation with the UNHCR. The Embassy learned separately that an American dual citizen who worked for a U.S.-based NGO was among the detainees. Egyptian State Security sources said on January 2 that the man had been released, but we have not heard from him. End summary.

UNHCR lacks access to detainees

2. (C) UNHCR Assistant Resident Representative Damtew Dessalegne told ECPO Counselor and Embassy Refugee Coordinator January 3 that UNHCR's request for access to detained Sudanese has still not been granted. UNHCR's Ministry of Interior contacts, through whom UNHCR gained access to Sudanese in Egyptian custody prior to the December 30 violence, have told UNHCR to make all further access requests, including routine requests unrelated to the December 30 incident via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to Dessalegne, the MFA is still smarting over UNHCR Geneva's public criticism of the GOE's actions on December 30. Dessalegne says that Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit's Chef de Cabinet, Wifaa Bassem, told Dessalegne not to call her again about access to detainees until UNHCR Geneva has made a public statement more to the GOE's liking. Dessalegne, asking Emboffs to treat the information carefully, said that the quid pro quo between access to detainees and a new UNHCR statement was explicit. Dessalegne reported that UNHCR may issue a new statement as early as January 3.

3. (C) Dessalegne said he could not confirm or deny rumors that deportations have begun; MFA denies any deportations. UNHCR Khartoum employees went to Khartoum airport January 2 in response to reports that 100 refugees were arriving on a flight from Cairo. The reports turned out to be false. According to Dessalegne, there were over 2,000 Sudanese in the park when the GOE cleaned it out. Since then, approximately 1,500 Sudanese have taken refuge at a Catholic Church in Cairo. Dessalegne believes that many of these, perhaps 1,000, were Sudanese at the park who had been released from GOE custody once they showed Egyptian visas or UNHCR refugee documents. Dessalegne had little to report on the remaining detainees. The GOE told him that they had recovered documents from the park and were reuniting those documents with their owners in detention, releasing those who are properly documented. As for the rest, UNHCR does not know how many may still be in detention, where they are begin held, or if some have been deported. UNHCR Resident Representative Saad al-Attar was at the MFA late on January 3 but no report on his meetings there are yet available.

14. (SBU) On January 2, Attar told the diplomatic corps and NGO representatives that GOE and Sudanese officials had made numerous interventions to broker a peaceful solution to the situation and said the UNHCR had sent the GOE three letters asking for help in resolving the matter peacefully. Attar also noted that UNHCR had no prior warning that MOI security forces planned to try to remove the protesters. Attar said that the UNHCR had not been able to confirm the number of Sudanese killed, injured or detained in connection with the incident.

MFA,MOI urged to provide access to refugees

15. (C) In January 2 and 3 conversations with MFA Assistant Minister for Americas Affairs Ali Al Hefny, DCM underlined the importance of providing UNHCR access to the Sudanese being held in temporary camps. He also stressed that MFA should coordinate closely with the MOI to ensure there would be no deportations without consultations with the UNHCR. Ali Hefny assured the DCM that the GOE is making efforts to accommodate the UNHCR and said that he would coordinate further with the MOI. Al Hefny also said that he believed that there were approximately 300 Sudanese still held in "temporary camps." He assured us there would be no deportations without UNHCR coordination.

16. (C) Also on January 2, Embassy Regional Security Officer reinforced with senior staff at MOI the USG's concern that the GOE grant UNHCR access to the Sudanese detainees. MOI personnel said the GOE intends to deport illegals but emphasized that the UNHCR would be part of this process.

GOE publicly defensive of incident

17. (C) The GOE has relied largely on the media to share its side of the story about what happened on December 30, emphasizing that it tried for months to negotiate a solution. Officials also assert that they tried to remove women and children from the occupied plot early to avoid injuring them. Unfortunately, the situation escalated before this could happen, and both women and children died.

Suzanne Mubarak learns of USG assistance to Sudan

18. (C) The Ambassador will meet with First Lady Suzanne Mubarak on January 4 to discuss the Sudan asylum seeker issue. In an introductory call by the Ambassador on November 23, Mrs. Mubarak described the substantial charity relief work that she and her foundation have been conducting among the Sudanese. She agonized over the dilemma between the obligation that Egyptians felt to provide what relief they could manage, despite Egypt's own poverty, versus the more fundamental need to "provide hope for these people" that they could return to their lives in Sudan. Egypt's goal, she said, was to encourage the Sudanese to return to their home country, or to find resettlement opportunities in third countries, as quickly as possible. Mrs. Mubarak commended what she had understood of U.S. assistance for Sudan and Sudanese asylum seekers, though she appeared only partly aware of the scope of the USG effort. (Note: We later provided her a fact sheet on direct U.S. resettlement of Sudanese refugees from Egypt; our support for UN and NGO resettlement programs for Sudanese going to third countries; our diplomacy to resolve Sudan's internal conflicts; and USG and private relief for Sudanese asylum seekers and economic assistance to offer hope for them to return to Sudan. End note.)

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